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The American Indian as Hunter

John Witthoft

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The American Indian---Hunter

By John Witthoft



Photo by Brenwasser, courtesy of Harry Shaw Newman, The Old Print Shop, New York.
Beaver hunting Cree Indians raid a beaver house in mid-winter.

PART I. The White Man and the Indian

WHEN our ancestors first came to this land, they found it already populated by a race of people whose ideas and whole manner of life differed so from their own background that there was almost no common ground. Especially different were the European and Indian attitudes toward the resources of nature and their use of them; farmland, places for habitation, firewood and lumber, game, and fish. To the Indian, the land and its natural produce were not subject to individual ownership and control, but were part of the domain under the control of supernaturals, its resources accessible to all individuals to whom the supernaturals might grant the bounty of nature. The Indian succeeded as a hunter or a farmer because he was favored by his deities, or so he be-

lieved; without their sanction, he would starve. The white man saw nature as a source of property, to be mastered by his efforts, while the Indian saw himself as a part of nature, who survived only because he kept his place in the scheme of things and was therefore aided and protected by the deities who controlled his natural environment.

The differences in attitudes toward land and game were no greater than other differences between these people, and can probably be understood in terms of the social and economic backgrounds of both peoples. The white man came from an overpopulated part of the world, where all land had been divided and subdivided for so many centuries that the idea of unused miles of forest was completely new to him. For many

centuries Europeans had lived where every foot of ground had been modified and used by humans, with every object and every clod of earth about him clearly identified as someone's property, with protection of ownership guaranteed by the gallows. This individual ownership included, of course, all game animals from the king's deer to the lowly hare. By 1700, the common man in many parts of Europe lived in a world completely owned by other people, without rights to firewood, game, recreation areas, or farmland. Many new developments in the American colonies were influenced by this background; our forefathers tried to use this new world for their own purposes as the "owners" and nobility had in Europe, and, at the same time, they tried to prevent anyone's monopolizing the resources of nature as the European nobility had. Every man would be a lord, but none a lord over peasants shut off from the resources of nature. These principles were and are operative in many areas of American life, the most important ones outside of our discussion here, but they have significance in the history of hunting and sport in America and in the development of our game laws. They were also a part of basic differences between Indian and white hunting.

American hunting and field sports show some interesting details as a result of this background. Several of these merit discussion here, as a contrast to Indian practice. The average American settler had no extensive experience as a hunter, unless he

came from one of the minor population elements from the Scottish Highlands or the German forest area. Even then, unless he had poached at great personal risk, he had little background in lone hunting for his own larder. Whatever his area of origin hunting had been a sport of the upper class rather than a significant source of food. The game that did exist there, had survived only because it was protected in a populated area, often on land that might better have been farmed. Thus in Europe hunting was a sport, a luxury of the noble and wealthy, and a mark of prestige and caste. It had probably been so since pre-Roman times. The workingman who ate a rabbit, a grouse, or a deer had killed it by stealth at the risk of his neck, and probably out of dire need. It was something stolen and taken by force, not granted out of the bounty of nature. Finally, the common man had little knowledge of firearms and other tools of the hunter. Guns were expensive, and their ownership was generally forbidden. There were no militia or citizens' military units. Gunsmiths dealt almost exclusively with the governments and wealthy sportsmen. The enlisted soldier used a very different gun than the hunter's sporting arm; the soldier's was a heavy, clumsy, inaccurate musket that required little attention and was nearly foolproof. The background of most of our settlers was very different from that of the frontiersmen to whom they gave birth, and we can see some of the results in American hunting down to the present day.

The American settlers developed patterns that were influenced by the European situation. Coming from countries where the nobility, the authorities, and the hired soldiery were armed but the citizens were not, the American made a point of keeping a gun, and he organized militia groups. The European peasant soldier could only be trusted with a military musket, but the American civilian and

JOHN WITTHOFT, State Anthropologist, has been employed by the Pennsylvania State Museum since 1948, engaged mainly in a study of the archeological history of the Delaware and Susquehanna Valleys. He is a graduate of the New York State College for Teachers and received his master's degree from the University of Pennsylvania. Mr. Witthoft is a nationally recognized authority on the American Indian and has done extensive field work throughout the eastern half of the United States.



The earliest known portrait of an eastern Indian hunter, "A Weoan or great lord of Virginia." The original water color of this photo is displayed in the British Museum, painted by John White in Virginia about 1588.

soldier undertook to care for and understand the precision tool of the sportsman, an individually crafted, rifled gun. The European sportsman made hunting a social affair, with elaborate drives, blinds, and decoys; the American hunter preferred the individualistic ways of the poacher, still-hunting and ranging alone. Hunting had been a prerogative of the privileged in Europe, and in America it kept some of its feudal prestige; hunting was a cherished right of the free man. Even today, American hunting as a sport carries many signs of its feudal origin,' as a pastime of the lord of the manor. In earlier times in America, game resources were to white settlers a startling new economic resource which belonged only to the taker. Hunting had been a mark of prestige, and

here was a nobleman's privilege open to anyone. The sportsman today represents a survival of feudal aristocratic tradition rather than of primitive economic activity. Indian hunting as known to us from Colonial and later times represents a very different picture.

The Huntsman and the Farmer in Indian Culture

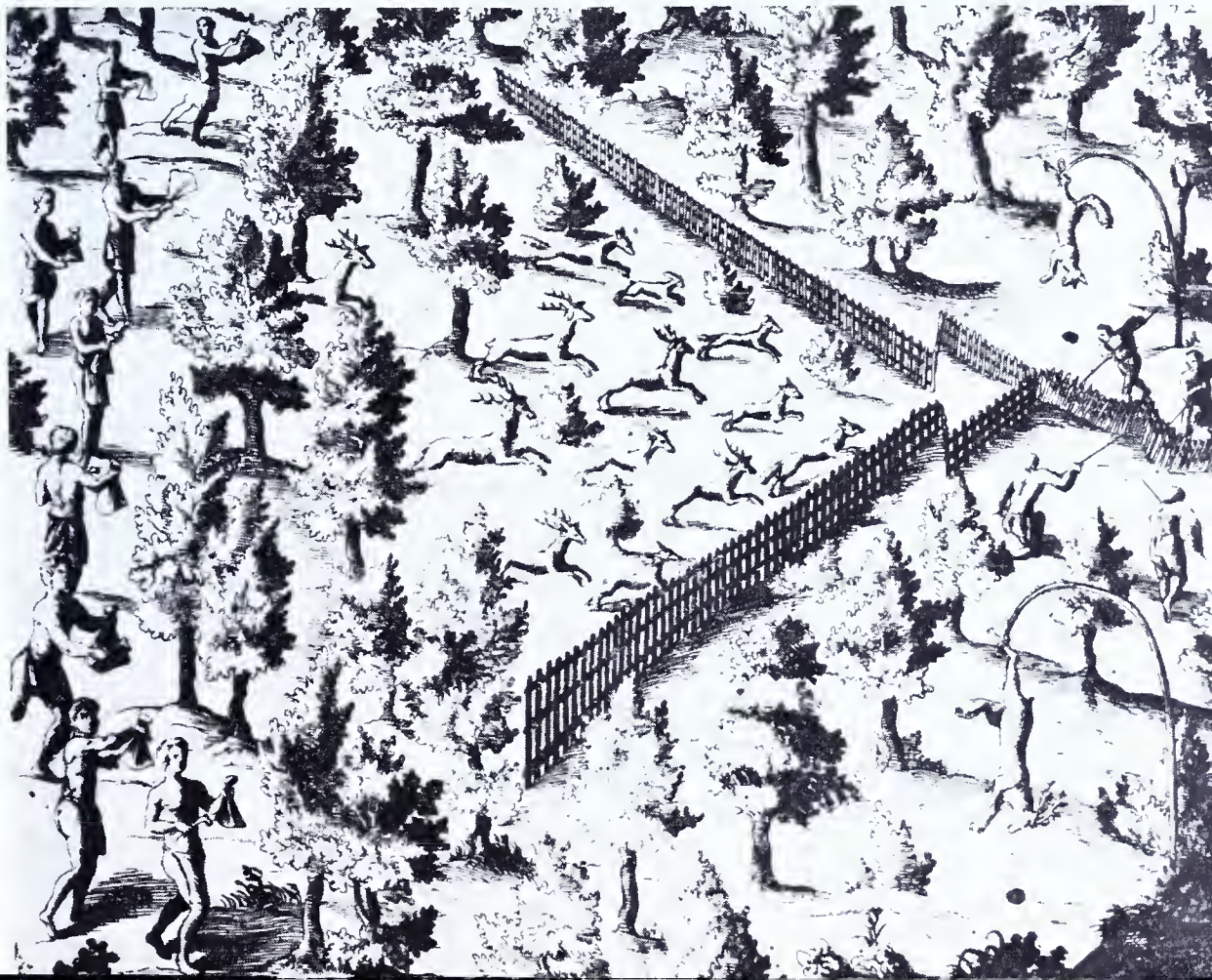
Hunting was an arduous and time-consuming activity of Indian men, and was not considered a sport in any sense. According to our folklore, the Indian women did all the work, especially the gardening, and the men whiled away their time irresponsibly on hunting and warfare. This is at best a half-truth, for this division of labor between the sexes involved equal responsibility and hard labor for both sexes. Women were the farmers, not because they had to be, but because they, and not the men, owned the farmland and its agricultural produce. Much earlier, farming had been invented by women, not by men, and agricultural activities remained a part of the woman's domain. Among primitive non-farming peoples, such as the Australian Aborigines, women are physically not fitted for hunting, and they gather wild vegetable foods to supplement animal foods taken by the men. At a similar stage in the dim Indian past, some women discovered that they could plant and cultivate some of the wild seed they gathered, and this discovery revolutionized Indian life throughout most of the Americas. Because women had been the first farmers, and because they were as capable at gardening as men could be, they monopolized this important part of the economy. In earlier times, when the family depended upon the hunter for food, woman's role as a gatherer was of very secondary importance. With the discovery of farming, however, hunting became of less importance; agriculture made bigger populations and town life possible,

and there were now enough people on the land that they could not possibly feed themselves on wild game. Farming remained a woman's monopoly, and women completely controlled the major food resources of the community. In light of this, we can readily understand the well-known fact (astounding to our patriarchal ancestors) that Indian women were dominant and self-sufficient and men subsidiary and dependent. The Indian woman was no drudge of a fieldfrau, but a matriarch who owned her own house and fields, controlled the food supplies of the household, and held greater authority than any man within the family and community. Within her sphere, the man was of secondary importance and was apt to be dominated by women on any important matters. Mother Earth and the Corn Mother were female supernaturals who controlled the fertility of the garden; they were women's

deities and the natural forces which they controlled could only be exploited by women, according to Indian belief. As in most other parts of the world, woman's status and importance was partly a factor of her importance to society; where women produce nothing and are seen only as ornaments, they quickly approach the status of a slave, while where they play major roles in food production and contribute proportionately to society, their status and privileges can surpass those of men.

The Indian woman, seen in native ideology as mother and gardener, was the central and most important member of the household; rather than being a mere drudge, she held an elevated position which is difficult for us to imagine. In terms of blood-money (the custom of payment to prevent the taking of blood-revenge) a woman was worth twice as much as a man; where the family of a killer

The deer hunt—an engraving published by Samuel de Champlain in 1632—showing a deer drive and deer snaring in the Northeast.



had to make formal payment to the family of the victim, Indian law determined that the sum must be doubled if the slain were a woman. The Indian woman held a more privileged and equal position in her society than women do in any European or American white community today. In terms of normal human compensation, her status was proportionate to her responsibility and her labor. Many white women who had been taken captive in warfare and who had become members of Indian communities refused to be ransomed; they would not return to the drudgery and subordination accorded women in Colonial society.

In the primitive economy of our Indians, farming was the major and most important food source, but all meat had to be obtained by the chase. Indians with hoe agriculture built up no great surplus, and it was the men's responsibility to supplement the vegetable foods with a fairly constant supply of meat. In times of crisis, when crops were inadequate or when stored foods were destroyed by accident or warfare, the survival of the community depended entirely upon the success of the hunter. The game of the countryside could not support the people for long or adequately, but it was their only salvation in times of famine. Such times of near-starvation must have been frequent, and every Indian hunter thought in terms of them, and of his game as an essential to the survival of his group. "We must hunt to feed our children" was the Indian's explanation of his tremendous efforts in the chase. The Indian was not hunting virgin areas, but woodland which had been coursed by experts for ten thousand years. The game supply was in some sort of balance with the hunting population, and the hunter could only take his quarry by patience, skill, and great effort. In a culture where hunting is not a game, but a necessary source of food, wom-

en are worthless as hunters and men cannot be spared to work with a hoe. Hunting and warfare were men's twin activities, and in both there could be no reserve, no avoidance of hazard, because the whole community lived too close to survival.

The Indian saw women's roles as religious matters, with garden and hearth activities delegated to women by the Creator, with the crops as a gift to the women by the supernaturals in return for labor and proper conduct in life. The agricultural activities of women and deities concerned with agriculture were central themes in Indian ritual. In the same way, men's activities and the supernatural world of the hunter held a central place in religious ideology, and game animals were gifts of the Creator and lesser supernaturals to the hunter, provided he did his work properly and well, and conducted his affairs in a precisely correct fashion. This involved matters of conservation, ritual, and taboo. Some of the greatest differences between Indian and white hunting practices lie in the Indian's religious attitude toward hunting activities and toward game animals. The white man saw game animals as meat which he found, as mere objects to be taken. The Indian considered the animal as an intelligent, conscious fellow member of the same spiritual world as himself. His own destiny was linked with that of the animals by the Creator, and he felt that both he and his victim understood the roles which they played in the hunt; the animal was resigned to its fate.

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. Courtesy Harry S. Newman, Old Print Shop.
Cree Indian duck hunting, about 1820.

PART II. The World View of the Indian Hunter

Beside the animals and animal spirits, actually animal ghosts, the hunter recognized other more powerful supernaturals in the woods about him. Most important of these in some areas, including eastern Pennsylvania, was the Keeper of Game, a half-human, half-animal-formed supernatural, who controlled the availability of game to the hunters. It was he who prevented the success of the hunter who had not conducted himself properly, and who saw to it that there was game in the woods for the good hunter. The Keeper of Game lived in the forests with his herds, and appears sometimes as half deer, sometimes as half bear. He could

bring death by a carefully prepared accident to the evil-doer, and he led and protected the game and sent forth the animals which were the hunter's quota. Sometimes he is confused with the bear, especially with a mythical supernatural bear, called the great naked bear or the lean white bear, who survives in white trappers' folklore as the "ranger." This mystic animal was a terrible omen to Indians in most of the North-east.

I do not want to give the impression that the supernaturals and the spirit beings were in any sense more remote or less real to the Indian than other people or the animals about

him. He drew no line between the physical and the spiritual worlds, and everywhere he felt the real presence of the supernatural in back of every phenomenon of the natural world. Mother Earth, the Corn Mother, the Keeper of Game, the Thunderer, and the wood spirits whom we know as the Mask Spirits, were not gods or deities, but superhuman beings. The Creator and his twin brother, the devious creator of evil things and of concealed blessings, were the deities, those who had created and who ruled the whole world with its graded series of lesser creatures. The differences between the Creator, the Keeper of Game, men, and animals were not distinctions between the natural and the supernatural; the differences were in the degrees of authority, spiritual power, and knowledge, which had all been determined at the time of creation by the twin Creators, so that man held a certain rank in a graded hierarchy of beings, real and imaginary. Man held no feudal lordship over animals, nor did the supernaturals hold vassalage over him; rather, he held a reciprocating, mutually beneficial relationship with each type of being.

The Creator and his devious brother, called by many names, among them "flint," "warty," and "the devious one," were sometimes identified with the east wind and the west wind. Our forefathers identified them with God and the Devil, and taught the Indians to do so, although the resemblances were remote. To the Indian, they represented the philosophic principles of direct and of devious action, of straightforward and of upside-down methods of accomplishing something. The Creator was the open, constructive person whose good motives were always obvious, whose good intentions became obvious facts. The devious one was the perverse individual, who always accomplished his ends by the most indirect method, who accomplished one result while

appearing to do exactly the opposite. The Indian saw the curious world in which we live as the handicraft of both twins, as the result of clear intention and of paradox working together as creative principles. The Creator made game animals, so his brother made carnivores; the Creator made edible plants, so his brother made briars and poisonous plants; the Creator made day, and night became his brother's domain. Neither one, by himself, could have made a world that would work, but the two together, in their competition, made the present universe. The Creator was responsible for obvious good, and his brother for all the bad features of the world, most of which also included concealed blessings. The devious one was not unfriendly to man, nor was he a destroyer or a hunter of men, but he stood for a basic theme, paradox, which both the Indian and the white man recognize everywhere in the world.

The universe ruled by these twins was seen as a series of horizontal layers, seven or twelve in number. Man's level, generally thought of as the third layer from the bottom, was a level largely ruled by him. A few beings of this realm, such as the Keeper of the Game and the Mask Spirits, were thought of as man's equals, sometimes possessing greater spiritual power. These, significantly, were beings of the forests rather than of the cultivated land. The Mask Spirits, best known to us from modern Iroquois sources, were spirits of the woods and perhaps of the winds, who had been banished to the wilderness by the Creator. Some Indians claim that they once lived in human communities. They are called "grandfathers," and they are poor cripples who live in the woods and do no farming. They crave tobacco, which they must beg from humans, and in turn they undertake to cure certain diseases through masked impersonators who represent them, and

to keep other evils away from mankind. Hunters frequently hear them in the woods and sometimes meet them face to face; I have several times heard eye-witness descriptions of them. They are not thought to control the game or the hunter's fortune, but the hunter pursues his business in their domain, and must be friendly and just to them, lest they bring him disaster, "break his speech" and make him stammer, or bring death through psychoses. They seem to be nearly man's equal in the evaluation of Indian philosophy.

The most important man-like beings of the wilderness were, however, the dwarfs, who were always about. In the natural order, they are thought of as nearly man's equal, having greater power and knowledge in some matters, and less in others. They live entirely by hunting, and their skill and stamina as woodsmen surpass that of any human. They are essentially the rulers of wilderness areas, which they share as hunting ground with the Indian, and are precisely like Indians in all details except size. They have their own communities in the rock slides and on the high mountain cliffs, where they hold their own ritual cycle and carry on their social and political life much like humans. They are sometimes thought of as twins, brother and sister, and they are sometimes confused with the Keeper of Game. The Delaware believe that the little people hunt with the bow and eat only the hearts of the game, while the Seneca and Cayuga insist that they hunt only with the sling, and hence sometimes call them "stone-rollers." The ordinary Delaware name for them is "they eat hearts." In some Indian communities, it is believed that the black squirrel is the only game they hunt, and that this animal is reserved for them. Indians everywhere consider the little people very important neighbors; like the masks, they are so important a part of reservation lore

that one never hears about them unless he brings them up in conversation. The average Indian assumes that everyone else has similar beliefs about dwarfs. There is no surer way to give deadly offense to an Indian than to express amusement at his quaint concept of the dwarf. He believes that such irreverent expression is as offensive to these little people as any other verbal or overt insult, and may incur their wrath and vengeance.

This matter of personal affront shown by an Indian when he has exposed his beliefs to ridicule is only partly a matter of chagrin and hurt pride. More essentially, he considers it a practical matter, for he has exposed both himself and a stranger to vengeance from the spirit world, from the dwarfs or from the mask spirits, or even from the deer or bear themselves if they be involved as the butt of such ridicule. This situation, the Indian's sensitivity to the possibility of retaliation and his experience that most strangers are boors who will make light of his most cherished beliefs, is the main reason why it is so difficult to get any deep understanding of the essential way of life and religious system from modern conservative Indian communities. Life among such retiring people goes on much as it always has, and the old systems are kept as faithfully as any zealot holds his creed, but none of it lies on the surface, or is exposed to unsympathetic eyes.

The dwarfs are conspicuous in this respect, for they are so commonplace, so well-known, and so ever-present that they are considered obvious. More than once I have had an Indian express surprise that I did not know of some detail about them, for everyone must know that much. I have heard a number of descriptions of them from people who believed they had seen them, some of them extremely detailed and precise. One aged Tuscarora described in detail the tailoring of their green clothing:

he was impressed by their solemn, kindly appearance when he met a pair while hunting as a young man. They are generally friendly to man, although they can be vicious enemies to the malefactor. Sometimes they have cared for children lost in the woods, and fed and sheltered them until they could return to their families; such individuals were under a strict injunction to say little about their experience. They sometimes guide or help the lost hunter, and may sometimes aid in the taking of game. In some areas, Indian hunters know spoken charms or invocations which are intended to gain the dwarfs' assistance, and in some cases they have given knowledge of some medicinal or food plant.

Dwarf-belief was once an important matter in Europe, too, although

only the merest vestige of this remains in our fairy tales. The Indian dwarfs are anything but fairy-tale people, and are still considered real and very important neighbors to humans. Unlike the European dwarfs, the Indian ones do not exact physical vengeance, but are magicians with greater supernatural powers than humans, in their own realm. The dwarf of the Swiss Alps was believed to push the evil chamois-hunter off of a cliff, but no such violence is attributed to the American little people. If they were offended by a man, they could ruin his luck in the hunt, keep the game away from him, and plague him with practical jokes. If seriously offended, they could conjure up diseases for him. Worst, they could "take away his mind." The hunter who had given the little people deep

A modern Seneca Indian house on the Cornplanter Grant in Warren County, Pennsylvania.
Penna. Dept. of Highways photo.



injury would not return to his home, but would be found wandering in the woods with a vacant stare and with no memory or intelligible speech, eating grass and bereft of all mentality. If he were found and led back before he starved, he became a village idiot, without intelligence or motivation, a harmless sort of animal. The high mountain areas were the sections where the dwarfs had their towns, and these desolate regions were never entered by Indians, for to trespass on the rocky peaks would be an invitation to what the Indians considered the theft of mentality by the dwarfs. Sometimes Indians mention other creatures who lived in the mountain fastness, including strange lean dwarfs with knifelike faces, almost two dimensional in appearance, and one-eyed human-like beings.

Among the Longhouse Seneca, Cayuga, and Onondaga, the people who hold to their aboriginal faith, one particular ritual, the Dark Dance, is specifically dedicated to the little people and their associates, the animal spirits. Dark Dance is held at night in the house in the autumn, at the time of the first killing frosts, and marks the beginning of the winter season; the songs are sometimes said to bring winter. The Dark Dance songs are, to my ear, the most beautiful in local Indian music. The ritual is held in the dark, with the doors and windows open, and a lighted lantern is placed in the doorway or on the porch as a signal to the beings who are invited to the ritual. A single male singer carries the burden of the four-hour long song, with an antiphonal female chorus. At intervals during the song, the women dance. The people are seated in a circle, and a roasted pig's head on a skewer is passed around and eaten during the ritual. The head is not touched but is held by the skewer, and one bites pieces off with one's teeth. The dwarfs and the animal spirits are believed to share in

this ritual feast, and to eat with the people as the head is passed around. Probably the pig is a substitute for the bear which was once eaten at rituals. The earlier verses of the Dark Dance songs are elaborate, poetic invitations sung to the dwarfs to come forth from their various places of abode in the wilderness and feast with the people.

All but the earlier part of the Dark Dance is made up of invitations to various animal spirits and to the animals themselves to come and partake of the feast with the people. At various places in the songs, as songs are sung to certain of those animals by the leader, the men in chorus imitate the call of the particular animal or bird. In terms of their importance, the Little People are invoked first in the Dark Dance songs, but the great bulk of the sequence is concerned with animals and birds, who are invited species by species. This ritual follows by less than a month the last of the rites dedicated to agriculture (the Harvest Festival), marks a major change in the Indian calendar, and begins the major hunting and trapping season. It is apparently the ritual whose major function is the placation of the spirits of game animals, and its place in the calendar indicates that it was a prelude to the most critical part of the year for the Indian huntsman.

Within the group of people who stage the Dark Dance for the community (the so-called Dark Dance Society) there is often, on Iroquois reservations, a smaller and more select group who care for and administer a very important gift from the animal world. They are the so-called Little Water Medicine Society, who must be responsible for a sort of national treasure, the Little Water Medicine. This material has a great reputation for the cure of broken bones and serious wounds, and white people near reservations at times apply for treatment with this potion. It



From *Seneca Myths and Folk Tales*

The beasts of the forest revive the body of the Good Hunter, as drawn by Jesse Cornplanter, of Tonowanda Reservation, in 1908.

is said to have been made up of the nerves of all the animals and the hearts of all the birds, mixed with several legendary magical plants. It was given to an Indian by the birds and animals and cannot be replaced when exhausted; hence a dose of it is the most minute quantity possible. It is an extremely dangerous material if handled improperly, since it contains the vital essence of the whole zoological kingdom, and special feasts and rituals must be held for it at specified times by its custodians. If any bundles of the medicine are overlooked or neglected, the package of the potion is heard singing the songs of the proper ritual, to warn the people of

impending catastrophe if the proper observances are not carried out.

There has been for some years a firm belief among the people at Cold-spring Longhouse, Allegany Reservation, that someone had sold a bundle of the medicine to a white man, and that several mysterious deaths and other disasters on the Reservation were a result of the neglect of this bundle by its white owner. In 1949, while sorting collections in the Pennsylvania State Museum, I actually found this package of the Little Water Medicine, collected by an ethnologist at Allegany in 1925. The ethnologist had died of a broken neck a year later, and the Indian

seller is reported to have wasted away and died in great torment. I hastened to return it to its rightful owners, who were somewhat relieved to see that I had wrapped it in the proper white cloth for transportation, and assured me that my good faith was sufficient protection against injury from the medicine. The custodians immediately held the proper feast and ritual for this long-neglected part of their most important ritual substance.

According to the origin story of the Society, this medicine was a gift to the Good Hunter, who typified all of the huntsman's virtues, and was thus rewarded. An almost identical origin story is told in connection with several other Iroquois medicine societies, and the tale is a very important part of Indian tradition. The Good Hunter was an exemplary Indian male, who conformed to the ideal of the hunter. He only killed when he needed food, and always left the entrails of his game for the carnivores of the forest. He always left some of his food at his camps for the animals, he was kindly, soft-spoken, and patient. As a result of his good behavior, the animals considered him a friend and came gladly to his bag. However, during the Cherokee War (i.e., the mid-eighteenth century), he was ambushed, killed, and scalped by a Cherokee war party. The animals found his body lying in the woods, and they all gathered to decide what they might do. First, the scalp had to be recovered and the crow accomplished this. Then the beasts set out to make a medicine to revive him. They all contributed from their most vital parts, the seat of their souls or vital essence; the birds of their hearts, the animals of their sinews (nerves). The Good Hunter was revived with the potion, but his scalp had been tanned and stiffened and it could not be fitted or attached to his head. They called the Great Dew Eagle, a supernatural

bird who carries a pond of dew on his back and sprinkles it as a reviving medicine on the earth during the night. He took some of the dew from his back and sprinkled the scalp, which became relaxed and alive and was replaced on the head of their friend.

When the Good Hunter was cured and ready to return home, the beasts gave him the residue of the medicine and told him how to use it. They also told him how it must be fed and cared for by periodic rituals, lest it bring death instead of good, and they taught him the songs and the procedure for the Societies' feasts. The present members of the group have become a part of the society of custodians as a result of having been cured by the medicine; as with many other Iroquois medicine societies, initiation is only by treatment, and one becomes a votary through being cured by the medicine. The numerous accounts of their own cures by this potion, as told me by members of the society, testify to the very high regard in which the hunter's medicine is held, and to the complete faith which these people have in its properties. This sacred material is, of course, an important part of the hunter's tradition, and its custodians perpetuate the ideal behavior of the legendary Good Hunter.

Perhaps I have spent too much space on discussion of the supernaturalism, religious beliefs, and thought of the Indian hunter, but I think these are more important to our knowledge of our Indian predecessors than are the details of hunting procedure. Both complexes, the mental one and the techniques, have almost completely disappeared except in a few areas, and it is now very difficult to get full information on either from living peoples. The fanciful and alien concepts involved in Indian lore make full understanding even more difficult.

The American Indian—Hunter

By John Witthoft



Courtesy Henry S. Newman, the Old Print Shop
Cree traveling on a winter trapline.

PART III.

Indian Hunting and Trapping

THE most important animal everywhere in our region was the white-tailed deer. In Pennsylvania Indian sites the bones of deer are more numerous than those of all other animals put together. That early day deer herd was the most important single source of meat to Indians, as well as a source of hides for clothing, antler and bone for tools, sinew and gut for bindings, and glue. The meat was eaten both roasted and cooked into stew while the bones and scrap were cooked into soup stock. Even the partially digested contents of the deer stomach and intestines were sometimes eaten. This may seem revolting to us, but, ac-

tually, such contents are a concentrated vegetable food of great nutritive value. Among many Indians it was used as a special diet for people who had been found starving—served as a thin broth, it was the only food which would not make them violently ill. As with most other animals, the brain and many of the internal organs were also eaten, so that practically nothing from the carcass was wasted.

Deer were taken by still-hunting and stalking, by driving, and by snares. Individual hunting was often the most important, and was an extremely arduous job, with the hunter often ranging for several days with

almost no food, attempting to ambush the deer on trails, to stalk them while feeding, or to surprise them in their beds at dawn. The deer-bleat, a type of animal calling device, was used to lure deer by imitating a lost fawn at times. Where deer were abundant within a small area, driving was a frequent procedure. Men surrounding the area closed in, driving the deer into a natural or artificial bottleneck, where they could be killed by a smaller party of hunters. Champlain's drawing of the deer drive (1608) shows the drivers pounding on deer shoulder blades with thighbones to frighten the deer. In most places the hunting pressure was probably too great for a deer-drive to be a frequent affair. Spring-pole snares, made by pegging down the bottom of a large noose in a game-trail, and attaching the rope to a bent-over sapling, were the usual deer traps. A deer walking into such a snare gets the noose around his antlers, neck, or belly and pushes it off the pegs, releasing the tension on the noose and tethering him. To be effective, such a snare did not have to lift a deer off of the ground, but merely had to keep enough tension on the noose so that the deer could not roll or scrape it off, and to partially counterbalance the animal's weight. When our pilgrim fathers landed in Massachusetts, one of the first things they did was to blunder into a group of such deer snares, and get several of their members dragged off the ground, no doubt to the great amusement of their Indian neighbors.

Elk were by no means as common as deer, but we find their bones in Indian sites in all parts of the state in much more abundance than we would expect. Elk were especially numerous in the northern part of the state and in the West Branch Valley of the Susquehanna. While we have little data on elk hunting, these huge animals seem to have been generally stalked by lone hunters.

Although there is a great deal of folklore and some historic record of buffalo in Pennsylvania, up to the present time only one piece of bison bone has been found in an Indian site in Pennsylvania, in Somerset County. It seems apparent that, regardless of the abundance of local tradition about bison, it was, to say the least, an unimportant animal in aboriginal Pennsylvania, probably too rare to be of any practical significance to the Indian. Moose, needless to say, are unknown from Pennsylvania Indian sites.

If the deer was the most valuable economic animal to the Indian, the bear was the most respected and admired. The bear is unlike any other local mammal in his general human-like appearance and in his speed, grace, and silence in the woods. In many places one finds Indians who will not eat bear meat, and who say, "How can you eat a bear? Have you ever seen one skinned out? It looks exactly like a man." Such people, one sometimes discovers, have a family tradition of descent from a bear or from a bear foster-child. These two tales, that of the bear husband and of the lost child adopted by bears, are found among Indians almost throughout the United States and Canada. The bear husband was a man, who while hunting bears, wounded a female bear and was badly injured himself in an accident. The bears found him and nursed him back to health. During his long stay among them, he learned their language and ways, and he came to look like a bear himself. Eventually he married the she-bear whom he had wounded, and at a later date he or a descendant identified himself to humans and taught them certain details of ritual, herb medicine, and woods lore. The particular version outlined here is the Cherokee origin story of the Bear Dance.

The adopted bear-boy is an even more frequent tale, of the lost child who is sheltered and fed by bears.

Later the bears are killed by hunters, and he is saved. The people learn most of what they know of bear-lore from him, and his descendants refuse to hunt or eat bear. Bear meat was the most important ritual food, almost a sacrament, and the bear was involved in elaborate patterns of ritual observance which are too complex to discuss here.

In Pennsylvania, Indians spoke of the bear as "my uncle" (father's brother), and generally believed that the bears were engaged in a very gentlemanly war-game with humans, under rules laid down by the Creator. Another common belief was that the bear came to the hunter who called him willingly, as a ritual food, and that the bear's spiritual immortality protected him from any serious injury at the hands of humans. Of all the animals about him, the Indian saw the bear in a special category, as a near-human and as a close relative. The belief in the human-like quality of bears was so strong that only strong religious motives allowed the Indian to hunt bear. The bear was both still-hunted and killed while in hibernation during the mid-winter. In the archeological sites, bear bones are, next to deer, the most abundant large mammal, and we find the remains of, say, a hundred deer for every bear in the excavations of Indian village sites.

Almost all of the other local mammals are represented in the garbage-bone from Indian sites, and we assume that most of these, like raccoon, opossum, skunk, fox, squirrel, groundhog, chipmunk, mouse, and shrew were trapline meat, cooked in the soup kettle along with turtles, frogs, and other minor animals. A few other animals eaten by Indians, including wolf, bobcat, and panther, must have been taken with the bow, however. Beaver and muskrat were sometimes trapped, but generally Indians used a much more effective taking method, breaking into the lodges in the winter. A hole was cut in the

ice over the entry to the beaver lodge, and then rods are driven into the lodge to drive the beaver out. As they swam out of the entry, they were speared. Probably many of the harpoon-shaped antler and bone points which we find in Indian sites were actually beaver spears. In taking muskrat, a day was selected when the ice was very thin, so that the escaping animals could be seen and speared through the ice without bothering to cut a hole. In alternative beaver-taking procedures, the entry to the lodge was blocked and the lodge torn open, or the beaver dam was torn down and the pond drained, leaving the animals easy prey. Needless to say, Indians today are extremely reluctant to admit any knowledge of this illegal and obsolete procedure, but it was once the ordinary manner of taking beaver. The beaver was probably of greatest importance to Indians as a fur for clothing and robes, but its meat was everywhere relished, and the tails, cooked separately in grease, were a great Indian delicacy. During the early Colonial Period, the scent glands and furs of the beaver were the most valuable articles in the Indian trade, and were in fact almost the whole basis of the fur trade. These scent glands or castors were the source of musk used in perfume, and were once a very valuable commodity. Indians everywhere, like whites, invariably mistake the castors for the testes of the beaver.

Almost all birds were eaten, judging by modern Indian usage and by the evidence from ancient village sites, but we find relatively few of the smaller birds of passage represented in the archeological sites. The wild turkey was the most important game bird everywhere, with the ducks and geese and the chicken-like birds, grouse and woodcock, much less abundant in the garbage bone samples. Passenger pigeon bones are actually infrequent in Indian sites, suggesting that this bird was much less abundant in aboriginal times than in



Hunting Birds - Canada

Historia Canadensis - Pater Creuxio

Killing of migratory birds, an engraving published by Franciscus Creuxius in 1664.

the nineteenth century, or else that breeding roosts were far from Indian settlements. Almost any local bird can be found represented in the excavated material, however. Many of these were probably trapped and snared by children, and small birds were especially important as food supplements in famine times, when the whole community collected small birds to eat.

The blowgun was also used to hunt birds, squirrels, and rabbits in Pennsylvania, western New York, and areas to the south. This hunter's tool is generally thought of as South American, but it was a common implement throughout the Southeast and in our immediate area. Grouse and similar birds, as well as rabbits, were generally hunted with special arrows, which had a special broad, blunt, heavy tip. Such arrows would crush and kill such delicate animals without mutilating them, whereas a pointed arrow would pass through and allow a mortally wounded animal to escape.

Turkeys were taken by both hunting with the bow and by trapping. In both cases, Indian techniques utilize two notable characteristics of the wild turkey, its keen eyesight and its extreme stupidity. Turkeys were lured to the concealed hunter by turkey calls, and a great variety of gadgets for imitating the sound of a turkey were used. The turkey will not come within range of a hunter he can see, however, so the hunter sometimes disguised his head with a deer-head mask or a wildcat mask made from the face of a bobcat, permitting him to watch his quarry without his exposed head giving him away. Trapping was probably the most usual way of taking turkey, and the great variety of turkey traps used include some which could fool nothing but a turkey.

The elaborate mechanical details of Indian traps and the vast lore about their use include too great a bulk of data to relate here. Indians

did, however, make expert use of a great variety of trap types, many of them exceedingly complex. In recent years, with the decline of trapping, most of these types have passed out of use and are all but forgotten. Most of the Indian traps still in use today have substituted a new trigger type, borrowed from the whites, for the older mechanisms, so that the figure-four trigger is now used on most Indian snares, deadfalls, and cage traps in the Northeast. Besides traps, the major implements of the Indian hunter during the late prehistoric and early Colonial times were the bow, the beaver-spear, the blowgun, the fishhook, and the fish-spear. Rabbits were also sometimes killed with clubs. Indian fishing is omitted from discussion here, because it was actually an elaborate business involving fish traps, pounds, and fish poisons more than it did fishing with the line or fish-gig.

Every aspect of Indian hunting was closely involved with ritual and religious concepts, as indeed was the whole life of the Indian; if I have over-emphasized this side of the picture, it is because it seems so basic in the relationship of man to nature in the aboriginal Northeast. Ritual and religious practice assure the Indian of protection against the ghosts and spirits of the creature he killed, and also determined the patterns which he followed in hunting and warfare.

One interesting object, the pack-strap or burden-strap, appears important in this connection. This was a long woven belt of soft fiber, with a broad central part which was held against the forehead or across the shoulders, while the ends were tied about any heavy load carried on the shoulders. One major function of the pack-strap was the carrying home of game from the forest. It is a great tribute to the hardiness and strength of Indian men that they could pack a whole deer carcass for miles on their backs.

In the ritualized procedures of Indian hunting, decorated pack-straps were considered a necessary binding for the body of an animal, even where the carcass was not carried by the strap. In some areas we have some data to show that this pack-strap was both a magical and spiritual binding, to overcome the animals' ability to retaliate, and a decorative binding intended to please and flatter the spirit of the dead animal. The strap became a symbol of the possession and control of the game animal by the hunter.

However, in warfare, the captive of war was brought home by his enemies tied and led by the same pack-strap, the symbol of possession and control of a corpse. In other ways the captive was in somewhat the situation of the captured animal, and his captors surrounded him with ritual forms which prevented his spiritual retaliation, exactly as with deer and bear. It was not so much that warfare was conducted by hunting patterns, as that hunting was a sort of ritualized warfare, carried on under strong religious sanctions. Since the Indian sensed powerful spiritual agents everywhere in the world about him, he was only able to do violence to animals or men when his ritual forms and religious tenets permitted this and insured him against retaliation from the supernatural world.

In conclusion, I should like to emphasize that this sketch of the mind and manners of the Indian hunter is a reconstruction, synthesized from information drawn from many sources and from different peoples of the area. Where, for example, Delaware and Seneca information has been drawn together into one discussion, or where our knowledge of New England or Carolina peoples has been drawn in to fill out details, we are dealing with ways of life that were common to most peoples of the general region, rather than with purely local patterns. After all, the way of life described here has been

long extinct in our area, and can only be characterized by using every surviving fragment and every clue we can obtain.

It should also be understood that the picture here presented pertains to late prehistoric and early Colonial times. Ancient ancestors of our Indians lived in a different fashion, judging by our knowledge of the archeology, and Indian ways of life changed very rapidly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries on the white frontier.

